



OVERDUE | INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

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Libraries are often associated with books, technology, and community programs, but one of the profession's most enduring commitments is something less visible: intellectual freedom.

The American Library Association defines intellectual freedom as “the rights of library users to read, seek information, and speak freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment,” and honestly, I could not have said it better myself. Few public institutions are as committed to protecting an individual's right to seek information and form their own conclusions.

People visit libraries seeking information, resources, and expertise. Libraries make those resources available without requiring patrons to justify their interests or adopt a particular viewpoint. They support this principle not because they endorse every idea contained in their collections, but because access to information allows individuals to form their own conclusions.

Without intellectual freedom, access to information becomes dependent on someone else's decision about what is appropriate, acceptable, or worth knowing. Intellectual

freedom recognizes that people cannot evaluate ideas, challenge assumptions, or expand their understanding if they are prevented from encountering information in the first place.

Intellectual freedom ensures that individuals can pursue their questions without someone else deciding which questions are acceptable to ask. Whether a patron is researching a health concern, exploring a career change, studying history, or satisfying simple curiosity, the role of the library is not to determine the right conclusion but to support the search for information. In practice, that means creating an environment where inquiry is encouraged and a wide range of perspectives can be explored. The library's role is not to direct thought, but to ensure that individuals have the freedom and resources necessary to think for themselves.

For librarians, intellectual freedom is closely connected to professional ethics. Like everyone else, librarians have personal beliefs, opinions, and preferences. Professionally, however, they are expected to separate those views from their obligation to serve the public. Collection decisions are guided by established policies, community needs, and professional standards rather than personal beliefs. The goal is not to tell people what to think, but to ensure they have the opportunity to think for themselves.

Libraries earn trust not by promoting a particular viewpoint, but by protecting every individual's right to explore ideas, ask questions, and pursue knowledge freely. In a society where information is abundant and opinions are often polarized, the commitment to helping people think for themselves remains one of the library profession's core values.

This has been OVERDUE. Come back next week to keep your account in good standing.

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